

Consideration of language education from early childhood to adulthood (old age) in Japan - Focusing on “transition”

-
Yukiko Ideno, Tokiwa University

Harusuke Kubota¹ and Takashi Yamamoto²

¹Waseda University

²Seinangakuin University

This research delves into the “connections” of language education across various educational levels in Japan, analyzing curriculum guidelines to highlight characteristics of these transitions. Additionally, it explores bilingual education policies targeting foreign workers within the context of adult and elderly education, emphasizing support for socially vulnerable groups through oral history methodology. This investigation aims to clarify the integration and progression of language education within Japan’s public curriculum, shedding light on the broader implications of educational policies for both the youth and adult populations.

In Japan, the curriculum emphasizes Japanese language learning within the “language” sector while treating foreign language education, including native languages of foreign children, as part of “environment” or “human relations” for cross-cultural understanding. As students advance, foreign language education, primarily English, becomes integral from middle grades and is emphasized in secondary education as preparatory for higher education entrance exams. Despite these structured transitions, the seamless connection of language education across different educational stages often goes unnoticed.

At the next stage, higher education, multilingual and international education is increasingly important in globalized society. These programs aim to provide students with the ability to communicate across cultures and understand global issues. By learning multiple languages and diverse cultures, students are better prepared for international careers and collaborations.

Furthermore, the evolution of adult education in Japan since the 1960s, particularly post-economic boom, has led to a university enrollment rate of 57.7% among the youth. Adult education focuses on supporting socially vulnerable individuals and enhancing economic skills, including corporate education and graduate studies. With Japan facing a super-aged society, there’s an increasing focus on education for older adults and labor support to foster independence.

This study highlights Japan's strategic shift towards inclusive, multilingual education across all ages, responding to globalization and a diverse workforce. It emphasizes the challenge of integrating language learning through educational stages, aiming to equip citizens for both local and global participation. Japan's approach reflects a broader vision for a society that values lifelong learning, inclusiveness, and adaptability, underscoring the importance of education in navigating economic shifts.